DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 916 PS 012 010

AUTHOR Slaughter, Diana T.
TITLE Historical Perspectives on Project Head Start.
PUB DATE Oct 80
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Curriculum Development, Roosevelt University (Chicago, IL).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; *Educational Change; Educational Innovation; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Principles; *Educational Trends; *Federal Programs; Program Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS *Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

Historical changes in the emphasis and focus of Project Head Start from 1965 to the present are briefly reviewed in this paper. Head Start was conceived of as primary prevention designed to enable children from lower income families to obtain educational prerequisites to formal schooling. The early years of the project were also characterized by ideosyncratic implementation and monitoring, an emphasis on the whole child, parent involvement, and uncertain outcomes. In the middle years, Head Start became the nation's laboratory for innovations in curriculum and evaluation in the areas of early learning and development. The project contributed to increased interest in the study of childhood development in the family, and emphasis on the use of observational methods. More recently, Head Start has give more attention to bilingual and bicultural models, and the impact of programs upon children's self-concepts and parental esteem. As yet, however, no profile of early learning and development in the families of prospective Head Start children has been made. In this regard, the future of Head Start lies in how well it can divulge what it has learned and is learning about how children and families positively cope with environmental stress and how the families provide a basis for positive early cognitive and social development. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED198916

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PROJECT HEAD START[1]

Diana T. Slaughter, Ph.D.

School of Education

Northwestern University

In this paper, I will briefly review, from my perspective, historical changes in emphasis and focus in Head Start from 1965 to the present times. My thesis is that Head Start has accomplished everything but what it was originally supposed to accomplish. A corollary to this thesis, is that these accomplishments surpass the limited, rather naive, early expectations.

My personal involvement with Head Start began in the spring and summer of 1965, the time of the first national implementation of this program. Since 1965, I have continued to monitor its impact upon my own and others' research and teaching activities. I've conducted a longitudinal follow-up of black Head Start children who were part of my dissertation research. Many graduated from Evanston Township High School in the spring of 1978. Over the years, I've also consulted with many groups and institutions which had received Head Start

[1]Paper presented in a keynote address to the Conference on Curriculum Development, coordinated by the College of Education, Roosevelt University, and sponsored by the Department of Human Services, Children and Youth Services Division, City of Chicago.

PS012010

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Diana T. Slaughter

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

funding. Some consultations involved direct service to teacher-trainors, prospective or actual teachers. Other consultations involved work with parents. Still others involved university program development or participation in primary decision-making groups who attempted to plan future directions for the total program. Most recently, I observed in a midwestern regional training session for prospective mental health consultants to Head Start Centers.

Before discussion of perceived changes in ideas about the (a) consumers, (b) curriculum, and (c) evaluation of contacts between consumers and curriculum, I will outline the initial broad objective and format of Project Head Start. It is important that, from its inception, Project Head Start was conceived of as a form of primary prevention. The now defunct Office of Economic Opportunity included Head Start in its armament against the War on Poverty, initiated by former President Johnson. Congress envisioned Head Start as a means to insure that children from lower income homes would obtain the educational prerequisites necessary to take full advantage of formal, traditional schooling. The reasoning held was that, if poverty-stricken children could, as a group, have more success in school, and Head Start would make success more likely, then incidence of (a) in-school violence and truancy, (b) school dropouts, (c) subsequent adult unemployment, (d) family disruption and disorganization, and (e) criminal activity in the

community would decline. Head Start was, therefore, an institutional paradigm designed to promote, support, and buttress family and community development. Changing the children who would be the adults in these families and communities was its primary objective. The first step in this process would be to maximize the likelihood that poor children would have equal educational opportunity. The children were to become educable. That is, the probability of their success or failure in traditional schools should be no different from the probabilities established for children from more privileged, affluent backgrounds. Success in school would increase the probability of success as a citizen after the thirteen years of formal education typically guaranteed to all American children.

PROJECT HEAD START: THE FIRST YEAR

The beginnings of Head Start were highly idiosyncratic. Cities, school districts, community agencies, existing local child care facilities were all eligible to seek funding. Three basic stipulations were made: (a) that the consumers be from poverty families, (b) that the curriculum contain an educational component, and (c) that some form of evaluation of the particular program be conducted. Even these minimal stipulations were advances over the existing monitoring of child care programs experienced generally by the nation's young children. That monitoring was highly idiosyncratic, and rarely subject to scrutiny by national or federal sources.

Families whose incomes were designated below a stipulated "poverty line" with preschool children, typically age 4, were eligible to enroll these children in Head Start. The first program was an eight week summer Head Start program aimed primarily at prospective kindergarten enrollees in the fall of 1965. Though these were notable exceptions, for example Susan Gray's work in Nashville, curricula tended to be eclectic, with an emphasis on making children "ready" for traditional schools. For example, early socialization was stressed, the process of becoming accustomed to school routines. The development of attentional skills was also encouraged through a variety of formal exercises and games. Other, basic sensory and motor skills were stressed. Evaluation typically involved pre and post testing on a measure of intelligence, such as the Stanford Binet.

However, even at this time Head Start placed an emphasis on the whole child. Physical health evaluations, for example, were considered integral facets of the program. Teachers were invited to use a newly developed Behavior Inventory to rate a wide range of social and emotional child behaviors in the classroom. Some programs even reached out to the children's families, typically through interviews with mothers and a variety of special events for families. Parents are always welcome observers to classrooms, and many mothers were either volunteers

or employed as aides to these programs. Still, the message communicated to parents was that somehow they had failed their children to that point, and that without the intervention of Head Start, the children would be unsuccessful in school and fail themselves, as had their parents, as adult members of the nation.

I vividly recall the furor and consternation when the Wolff(1966) study indicated that no cognitive gains were made by a sample of children enrolled in the summer program. Developers and evaluators felt undermined because, by then, they had begun to realize the complexity and enormity of the task before them.

First, community groups, and many professions had begun to challenge the motions of cultural deficit, disadvantage, or deviency attributed to lower income children and families. For example, in 1965 Kenneth Clark published Dark Ghetto which, among other things, reported the findings of New York's HARYOU project, and placed blame for children's academic underachievement's squarely on schoolteachers' expectations. Clark argued forcefully that teachers of lower status and minority children did not expect them to learn and achieve, and that the children accordingly adjusted their academic achievements to the lowered levels of expectations held by teachers of these children, by comparison to teachers of higher status and nonminority children. Popular books such as Jonathan Kozol's Death at an Early Age also raised public consciousness.

Perhaps more immediately embarrassing were the apparent

inadequacies of existing early childhood curricula and available evaluation tools. Existing curricula, for the most part, were not designed to address the underachievement of groups of children. Rather, they were designed to enhance socialization skills and reinforce readiness behaviors. Little emphasis was placed upon the motivational and cognitive components of intellectual development. If the intellectual or academic performances of Head Start children were to be improved, curricula which emphasized intellectual development would have to be developed, piloted, and implemented. Further, since most intelligence tests required at least six months before gains beyond the effects of normal maturational processes could be observed, more flexible evaluative tools were indicated. In addition, many program administrators and directors repeatedly observed that these tests did not encapsulate the essential substance and benefits to their communities of their intensive efforts. They believed social benefits to children, as well as their parents, should be assessed. They spoke of how, in some communities, Head Start had achieved a level of racial and ethnic integration among children and adult staff not currently achieved by existing neighborhood schools. They argued that the individual children they had come to know made differential use of the resources they were able to offer, in accordance with their personality characteristics and preferred learning styles. They emphasized

how critical staff development was for their emergent programs; as a whole, the nation had little idea of how to prepare and train teachers of preschool children - teaching skills appropriate for primary grades were not immediately transferrable. Perhaps most important, program developers and evaluators, many of whom were child development professionals and educational psychologists, emphasized that an eight-week program, however superior in quality, was too brief an intervention to sustain a viable, primary prevention effort. By the conclusion of that initial summer program, efforts were already underway to expand Head Start to a one year program. The idea of essentially innoculating children at a critical period for all future learning efforts was being slowly undermined.

PROJECT HEAD START: THE MIDDLE YEARS

Head Start, and its parent offshoots like Home Start, became the nation's laboratory for innovations in curriculum and evaluation, relative to early learning and development. Its impact and influence was felt up and down the young child's life cycle. Infant programs (eg. Gordon, 1977) were developed; follow-through programs were generated. Head Start itself spawned staff development programs (eg. Child Development Associates program), as well as the considerable diversity of structured preschool programs now available. One has only to

examine some texts, such as Day and Parker's Preschool Curriculum, to realize how much has been accomplished since the mid-sixties. Though it is clear that earlier cognitive gains are rarely sustained without follow-through programs in traditional schools, some recent data (Lazar, I. et.al., 1977) indicate that, on average, the early group of Head Start children were least likely to be designated for special education classes, by comparison to controls, in subsequent academic settings. Proponents of Head Start cite this finding as important to any cost-benefit analysis of the effects of the total program.

From my perspective, however, Project Head Start contributed to our gradual realization of how little we know about the processes of childhood learning and development in the family. We also discovered that we really knew very little about the families of the children we wished to help. These dawning realizations had several origins.

First, the emphasis on early learning and development meant that programs would either (a) be initiated with children in their homes, as was the case with the early Schaefer-Aronson (1977) program, or (b) involve instances in which both mother and infant or toddler participated, as with the Gordon (1977) and Levenstein (1977) programs. Professionals in child development contacted children's families because they wished to deliver curriculum to children at younger than preschool ages. These

contacts served to reinforce the idea that continuity and transfer of specific processes induced by these curricula would have to be insured by the parents, typically the child's mother.

Second, many parents had varying amounts of involvement with Head Start center activities. Program staff wished to maximize the likelihood of: (a) community support for their general efforts, and (b) parental reinforcement in after-school contexts for their curriculum objectives. Whether through administrative advisory board membership, intensive work as a teacher or teacher aide, regular attendance at parent meetings, or specific participation in structured parent programs, some plan for involvement of parents was elaborated by most centers. In these contacts, a public dialogue between the parents and their children's teachers began.

Third, a burgeoning research literature on parental factors influencing children's intellectual development was being critiqued. This literature had provided the scientific rationale for the above earlier efforts. Freeberg and Payne (1967), for example, found that much of the data being generated utilized retrospective interview techniques or structured parent-child teaching sessions, strategies which, by themselves, yielded little information as to what actually could be observed by way of parental teaching or tutoring in homes. Even more striking was the realization that we knew little, by way of observations during early childhood,

about the emergent competencies of higher status or majority children who did appear to prosper in traditional schools. White (1973), for example, theorized that by age three, the precursors of academic and social competence could be observed in these children; but no such comprehensive home or school data are available, even now, for lower status or minority children. When this burgeoning literature pointed toward the importance of (a) parental influences upon language acquisition, and (b) the use of language during standard intellectual performance testing, critics argued that early educators had rather simplistic, stimulus-response, notions of language acquisition, which emphasized surface structure rather than a more profound understanding of the relationship between conceptual development and deep-structure linguistic forms.

These developments led, I believe, to a revitalization of interest in the study of childhood development in the family, and to an increased emphasis on the use of observational methods with young children of all ages. Head Start had forced us to realize that a label such as deprived or disadvantaged cannot be proscriptive for curriculum development and evaluation. Rather, we needed more information about the processes by which, and through which, such labels are acquired. More specifically, we needed more information about the child's early conceptual development in the family, the family itself as a total learning

environment, and how teaching and learning typically, as well as ideally, would occur in the traditional grade schools the children would most likely attend. Perhaps most important, new criteria for how this knowledge was to be obtained were generated in the late 60's and early 70's.

HEAD START: THE RECENT PAST AND PRESENT

The writings of Clark (1965), Billingsley (1968), Baratz and Baratz (1970) and others emphasized the resiliencies and competencies of the poor, as well as of ethnic and racial minorities who have especially high numbers of poverty-stricken families. Valentine (1968) argued that, properly speaking, one could not designate a "culture" of poverty, and Ryan (1971) emphasized that such a strategy was, in effect, "blaming the victim" of the crime. Minority social scientists, in particular, stressed that cultural differences between the children's families, and the families of children in the majority culture, must be accommodated to by traditional schools, in distinct opposition to a strategy which emphasized the child's assimilation into schools as they presently existed. They found little to be surprised about in contemporary preliminary reports that Head Start had not achieved its initial goal of improving poor children's academic achievements (Westinghouse House Report, 1969)

They stressed that the school appeared unable to generate programs and curricula which had inherent meaning and substance for its poor and minority and constituents.

Gradually, Head Start began to adopt a more pluralistic perspective -- it considerated contextual factors relative to both curriculum planning and evaluation. In particular, more attention was given to bilingual and bicultural models, and the impact of programs upon children's self-concepts, and parental esteem. Variables which emphasized personal and social development found renewed support under these conditions. Knowing about oneself, and positively perceiving oneself, were construed to be legitimate objectives of programs that were to be evaluated. Importantly, this is a quite different emphasis from the earlier emphasis on social skills and social adjustment. The latter stressed passive, socially acceptable behavioral accommodations; the former stresses active coping and social problem-solving, given one's knowledge, and positive appraisal, of self. Most recently, researchers (eg. Zigler and Trickett, 1978) have emphasized children's social competence as a critical focal point for Head Start program developers and evaluators. Provisions were recently formalized within Head Start for mental health consultative services to children and staff.

From my perspective, however, the crucial issues raised by Head Start in its early years have not been addressed. We do

not yet have a profile of early learning and development in the families of prospective Head Start children, and thus, we do not yet understand the relationship between learning at home and learning in school. Without this knowledge, the revitalized emphasis on social competence will simply put new wine into old bottles (models - sic!). We know that follow-through is necessary to preserve earlier cognitive gains, but we do not know why this is so; we know that parental involvement typically maximizes the likelihood of cognitive gains, as well as maintenance of those gains (Bronfenbrenner, 1975), but we have few explanatory models which elucidate the processes. Consolidation of earlier efforts requires more careful attention to these issues by researchers and program developers.

Why have we been so reluctant to study poor and minority children and families from the perspective of their competencies and resiliencies? I think, quite simply, it is because we don't know how, and we have been, in the past, too often singularly unwilling to risk support of those who would do so. But I also think, perhaps overly optimistically, that the future will see a diminishing of this reluctance, largely because of some national trends. These trends could bring the, by now, lumbering bureaucracy or, depending upon your preference, great institution, of Head Start to the forefront once again.

HEAD START: FUTURE PROSPECTS

The nation has, particularly since the mid-70's, entered a period of economic recession. Inflation has placed increasing numbers of families below desirable income levels. More mothers are working to obtain needed added income. However, the heightened divorce rates, as well as the impact of the women's movement, has resulted in more children than ever before being likely to be reared in single-parent homes. Traditional schools have also been denigrated: even children from affluent families are not performing as well as comparable groups of children did fifteen years ago on standard achievement tests and college entrance exams. In short, the intellectual development of the nation's children, as a whole, may now be at risk. Furthermore, innovative educational options, such as alternative public and private schools, have not yet provided convincing evidence that children do learn to read, write, and do math within them. In addition, the idea that years of formal schooling per se, results in occupational success has been challenged; level of education and occupation do correlate substantively, but family background may preempt education in relation to occupational success (Jencks, 1972). Certainly, recent developments in the political arena, have informed us that the nature, but not the quantity, of criminal activity is regulated by social status. Public confidence in our various leaders may, indeed, be exceptionally low.

In short, the very context, attitudes, and behaviors attributed to Head Start children and their poverty-stricken families fifteen years ago, have become increasingly widespread in the nation as a whole, particularly its urban areas. The social problems Head Start was created to partially resolve now, in varying degrees, afflict the nation. Head Start is the nation's only existing laboratory with a potential for dealing with these problems if, and only if, it can reveal what it has learned, and is learning, about how embattled children and families positively cope with environmental stress, and how the families of these children, despite this stress, can often serve as incubators for positive early cognitive and social development. The future of Head Start, I believe, lies in how well it can inform and serve the nation in this regard.

Conversely, the principal lessons of Head Start are lessons for us all. Head Start did not succeed as a vehicle for equal educational opportunity, primarily because the causes of low academic achievement did not lie solely with the children's families. We now know that these causes are multiply determined and shared by all the children's caregivers, parents and teachers alike. We also know that how we instruct, as well as our criteria for what is learned, will determine whether we consider specific programs to be successes or failures. We owe our children a more careful appraisal of our programs, such that there is a relationship

between the content of these programs and the criteria of effectiveness. Thus short-term goals and an emphasis on continuity of care are likely to be essential aspects of Head Start in the future.

Most importantly, we have a much healthier respect for the child's role in his or her own learning and development. It is clear that this very gradual process may begin even before birth, and that biological as well as sociocultural factors regulate only parent-child interactions. A social psychological model which emphasizes the gradual, joint construction of knowledge by both child and parent or teacher (Richards, 1974) seems a much more salient way to construe this process than the essentially innoculation-based, medical model with which we began in 1965. These newer models invite pluralistic conceptualizations of childhood competence.

My own research (Slaughter, 1977) has suggested that once children enter formal schools, interactions between parent, child, and teacher comprise the essential behavioral units of study. Early development in the home and subsequent development in home and school contexts, may, for many children, be discontinuous. At the least, in order to effectively instruct older children, we need to know about teacher behavior, as well as parent behavior. Interestingly, I've also found, by way of observation, interview, and performance test results (Slaughter,1979),

that intervention with mothers alone, can affect differential early childhood development prior to school entry (ages 18 to 44 months).

We found that mothers became involved when programs were perceived to be personally beneficial to them; that is, when they perceived we genuinely believed the act of mothering, insofar as the mother may be the child's earliest teacher, was really very important.

In short, there is evidence that normal or induced changes in children's social environments can differentially affect their development. These findings indicate that a broad-based laboratory which can explore the range of environmental variations among family structures and life styles now emerging in the national profile, will be very useful to us all. It will be especially useful if the laboratories can tell us how structured learning programs interface with these familial variables. At present, from my perspective, Head Start is the only such national laboratory available.

In concluding, I am proud to have been a part of Head Start's beginnings. As one of its early supporters, I marvel at its growth and development as an institution - what it has meant, and will continue to mean, for all of us who care about the development and education of young children and their primary caregivers. I hope that these observations will stimulate you to form your own "historical perspectives on Head Start." I hope, most of all, that Head Start will realize its leadership

potential in the contemporary issues now confronting our nation's children and families. Thanks to the stimulation of Head Start, we now have many curriculum and evaluation strategies for early childhood education programs. What we need is a concerted strategy for consolidation of these earlier efforts which articulates with current national concerns for skill acquisition and educational accountibility. I believe that strategy can only emerge clearly when we better understand the contribution of the child's family to his or her learning and development.

References

Baratz, J., & Baratz, S. Early childhood intervention: the social science base of institutional racism. Harvard Educational Review, 1970, 40, 29-50.

Billingsley, A. Black families in white America. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968.

Bronfenbrenner, U. Is early intervention effective? In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), Influences on Human Development (2nd ed.). Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1975, 329-354.

Clark, K. Dark ghetto. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.

Freeberg, N., & Payne, D. Parental influence on cognitive development in early childhood: a review. Child Development, 1967, 38, 65-89.

Gordon, I., Guinagh, B., & Jester, R. The Florida parent education infant and toddler programs. In M. Day & R. Parker (Eds.), The Preschool in Action (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1977, 95-128.

Hess, R., & Bear, R. (Eds.), Early education: current theory, research, and action. Chicago: Aldine, 1968.

Jencks, C. Inequality: a reassessment of the effect of family and schooling in America. New York: Basic Books, 1972.

Lazar, I. Persistence of school effects: a national collaborative study by twelve research groups for the Education Commission of the States. New York State College of Human Ecology, Community Service Laboratory, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., 14853. September, 1977.

Levenstein, P. The mother-child home program. In M. Day & R. Parker (Eds.), The Preschool in Action (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1977, 27-50.

Richards, M. (Ed.), The integration of a child into a social world. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

Ryan, W. Blaming the victim. New York: Vintage, 1971.

Schaefer, E. & Aaronson, M. Infant education research project: implementation and implications of a home tutoring program. In M. Day & R. Parker (Eds.), The Preschool in Action (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1977, 51-72.

Slaughter, D. Relation of early parent-teacher socialization influences to achievement orientation and self-esteem in middle childhood among low-income black children. In J. Glidewell (Ed.). The Social Context of Learning and Development. New York: Gardner, 1977, 101-132.

Slaughter, D. Modernization through education of mother-child dyads. Final Report II to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Grant Foundation of New York, June, 1979.

Valentine, C. Culture and poverty. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Westinghouse Learning Corporation/Ohio University. The Impact of Head Start. Springfield, Virginia: Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information, U.S. Department of Commerce, June 12, 1969.

White, B. Experience & environment (Vol. 1). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1973.

Wolff, M. & Stein, A. Six months later - a comparison of children who had Head Start, summer, 1965, with their classmates in kindergarten, a case study of the kindergartens in four public elementary schools. New York City. Study 1. New York, N.Y.: Yeshiva University, Ferkauf Graduate School, August 18, 1966. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service Nos. ED 015025-015026).

Zigler, E. & Trickett, P. IQ, social competence, and evaluation of early childhood intervention programs. American Psychologist, 1978, 33(9), 789-798.